

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2376
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AAMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2380
USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
URHQHQA/USCINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4721

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT 8,
SUBJ: BIO DATA: GEORGE MATTHEW FERNANDES, MINISTER
OF COMMUNICATIONS

1. CURRICULUM VITAE: FERNANDES WAS BORN ON JUNE 3, 1930
NEAR MANGALORE, THE WEST COAST OF WHAT IS NOW KARNATAKA
STATE. OF A CATHOLIC FAMILY, FERNANDES INITIALLY STUDIED
TO BE A PRIEST BUT QUIT THE SEMINARY AFTER THREE YEARS
BECAUSE OF POOR HEALTH AND A CHANGE OF MIND. HE IS MARRIED
TO LEILA KABIR FERNANDES, DAUGHTER OF THE LATE MUSLIM,
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WEST BENGAL POLITICAL LEADER AND GOI MINISTER, DR.
HUMAYUN KABIR. THEY HAVE ONE SON. MRS FERNANDES IS A
NURSE-SOCIAL WORKER AND A POLITICAL ACTIVIST IN HER
HUSBAND'S BEHALF.

2. POLITICAL CAREER: FERNANDES OR GEORGE, AS HE IS
UNIVERSALLY KNOWN, HAS USED THE LABOR MOVEMENT AS A

STEPPING STONE TO POLITICS. THIS HAS EARNED HIM THE ENMITY OF SOME TRADE UNIONISTS WHO BELIEVE THAT HE HAS SACRIFICED THE WORKERS' INTERESTS TO HIS DRIVE FOR POLITICAL POWER. THIS CHARGE HAS FOUND VOICE AMONG SOME OF THOSE WHO WORKED WITH HIM IN THE 1974 NATIONAL RAIL STRIKE. OTHERS FIND HIM GENUINELY DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE OF THE INDIAN WORKER. FERNANDES BECAME A UNION ORGANIZER AT THE AGE OF 20 AMONG ROAD TRANSPORT WORKERS AND LATER AMONG DOCK WORKERS IN BOMBAY. FROM THERE HE BRANCHED OUT TO OTHER FIELDS SUCH AS MUNICIPAL WORKERS AND RAILWAYMEN. HE SERVED AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT ALL INDIA RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION UNTIL JULY 1976 FOLLOWING HIS ARREST IN JUNE. DIFFERENCES AMONG THE SOCIALISTS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT LED HIM TO FORM HIS OWN LABOR CONFEDERATION, THE HIND MAZDOOR PANCHAYAT, WHICH NEVER GAINED SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH OUTSIDE OF THE BOMBAY AREA. FERNANDES' RECENT POLITICAL CAREER HAS BEEN ONE OF VIRULENT OPPOSITION TO MRS GANDHI AND HER CONGRESS PARTY. HE WENT UNDERGROUND WITH THE DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY IN JUNE 1975 AND EVADED THE POLICE FOR ALMOST A YEAR. THIS IS A TRIBUTE TO THE NUMBER OF HIS FRIENDS AND HIS MENTAL AND PHYSICAL AGILITY. FOLLOWING HIS ARREST IN JUNE 1976 HE WAS CHARGED WITH LEADING A CONSPIRACY TO TOPPLE THE GOVERNMENT BY FORCE, WHICH CHARGES HAVE NOW BEEN WITHDRAWN. FROM HIS VARIOUS HIDE-OUTS, FERNANDES WROTE AND HAD DISSEMINATED MANY LONG TRACTS ATTACKING MRS GANDHI AS THE WORST TYPE OF DICTATOR. THERE IS A SLIGHT IRONY IN THE FACT THAT MRS GANDHI WAS AMONG THE GUESTS AT FERNANDES' WEDDING

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RECEPTION IN 1971. FERNANDES IS NOT A GANDHIAN BELIEVER IN NON-VIOLENCE. IN THE EARLY DAYS OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER, HE DIFFERED WITH HIS SOCIALIST PARTY MENTOR, DR RAM MANOHAR LOHIA, ON THE QUESTION OF THE PLACE OF GANDHIAN IDEALS IN POLITICS. FERNANDES DISAPPROVED HAVING LIMITATIONS PLACED ON THE MEANS AVAILABLE TO ACHIEVE HIS OBJECTIVES. FERNANDES WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT FROM BIHAR STATE UNDER THE JANATA TICKET. HE WON HIS SEAT WITH THE THIRD LARGEST MARGIN OF ANY CANDIDATE, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS IN JAIL THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN. GEORGE HAS BEEN PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY, ONE OF THE SMALLER CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF THE JANATA PARTY. HIS FIRST ELEVATION TO THE NATIONAL POLITICAL STAGE WAS HIS ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT IN 1967 AS A MEMBER OF THE SAMYUKTA SOCIALIST PARTY. HE DEFEATED A CONGRESS PARTY BARON, S.K. TAIL IN A SURPRISE UPSET.

3. IDEOLOGY AND POLICIES: GEORGE'S HARSHEST WORDS HAVE BEEN RESERVED FOR THE SOVIETS. IN ONE OF HIS

TRACTS DISTRIBUTED FROM THE UNDERGROUND, FERNANDES WROTE: "... PRESENT DAY RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF CZARIST RUSSIA. IF ANYTHING, THEY ARE MORE DIABOLICAL...." HE HAS ALSO BEEN VERY CRITICAL OF THE UNITED STATES ON ISSUES SUCH AS VIETNAM AND THE TILT TOWARD PAKISTAN. HOWEVER, HE IS GENERALLY SYMPATHETIC TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AND HAS PRAISED THE STRENGTH OF OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. HE HAS CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH LEADERS OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, WHICH ROSE TO HIS DEFENSE WHEN HE WAS CHARGED WITH CONSPIRACY. THE PRC HAS COME UNDER FIRE FROM HIM FOR ITS "RAPE" OF TIBET, AND MORE RECENTLY FOR ITS SUPPRESSION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS. FERNANDES HAS ADVOCATED A STRONG MILITARY POSTURE FOR INDIA, INCLUDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WHICH HE URTED AT THE TIME OF THE 1971 WAR WITH PAKISTAN.

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4. IN SUM, FERNANDES IS A VOLATILE, CHRISMATIC POLITICAL LEADER. WHETHER HE CAN ALSO SERVE AS A MEMBER OF THE CABINET TEAM WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR A DIFFICULT ADMINISTRATIVE JOB REMAINS THE CRITICAL QUESTION.
SCHNEIDER

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